



New fire engine, 1920 - 156.08

Cambridge FIRES Chronicle compiled by Mike Petty

This forms part of *A Cambridge Chronicle 1888-1990*

headlines

Volunteer Fire Brigade formed 1875, another at Chesterton amalgamated 1911; 1921 replaced by Police fire brigade till Fire Brigades Act 1938 when every county borough or county district to organise; 1939-45 became NFS & to local control - Cambs 1948 [446.16.1]

1890 10 30

Biggest fire in 30 years at Clare College [1.3]

1895 03 15

Two die in fire at tobacconists, Trinity Street, - Ch 15 Mar 1895, [1.4]

1896 11 20

Fire at candle factory [1.21]

1897 07 07

Station Road fire, 1897 07 07 p2 & 8th, p3 CDN

1897 10 08

There was a large attendance of the public when the annual inspection of the Cambridge Fire Brigade took place. The proceedings commenced with an inspection of the fire appliances, after which a drill for the raising of insensible men and carrying them to a supposed place of safety was gone through. The escape drill, carrying men down the escapes, bringing men off with ropes, hand-pump and bucket drill and jumping sheet drill was also gone through. The Mayor said that they would shortly be having

the benefits of some more jumping sheets, which would be distributed over various parts of the town.
No doubt those sheets would be a great protection to outlying districts for low houses 1897 10 08

1898 02 14

After a considerable period of immunity from serious fire outbreak, Cambridge was visited with a fire which, but for the prompt measures taken for its suppression, must have caused widespread destruction of property in the vicinity. The conflagration occurred at Mr Varty's cycle stores in Bridge Street. The cause is supposed to have been a large lamp which was hanging up in the shop falling to the floor and igniting. The building is a very old one and contains an enormous amount of timber and this, upon being seized by the flames, burnt rapidly and fiercely. A large number of bottles of lubricating and lamp oils in stock added to the conflagration. Some 60 bicycles which were stored at the back of the house, belonging chiefly to University men, were rescued, together with some horses stabled in a shed at the side of the house 1898 02 14

1898 03 14

Jesus college fire in rooms of undergraduate in third court. Room was filled with valuable furniture and large amount of unique china and pictures. The whole staircase will have to be practically rebuilt and what not damaged by fire was ruined by water CDN 1898 03 14

1898 06 11

A small fire occurred at the premises of Messrs Thomas Stearn and Son, photographers, at Bridge Street, Cambridge. The conflagration broke out in the darkroom and was probably caused by woodwork becoming overheated by gas. A considerable amount of photographic apparatus was destroyed by the flames, and some of the chemicals exploded with some violence in the heat. About 16 firemen turned out with a hose cart and three reels, causing no little excitement in the neighbourhood, but by the time they arrived on the scene the outbreak had already been extinguished by the inmates, by means of buckets CDN 1898 06 11

1898 09 05

Awful was the fate of an aged women residing in East Road Cambridge, on Saturday night. Her body was found scorched, blackened and blistered in her burning house. Every article of clothing was burned, and not a hair remained on her head. Those who saw it were sickened at the uncanny sight. As quickly as possible she was carried to a costermonger's barrow and covered up with the first things that came to hand, after which she was taken to Addenbrooke's Hospital. The fire brigade was hampered as the telegraph wires are set so low in that part of the town that it is impossible to run the fire escape along without catching the wires and causing not only damage but delay. In this instance the escape was delayed by catching the wires in Burleigh Street 1898 09 05

1898 10 05

A fire in the daytime is infinitely easier to cope with than one of equal dimensions at night, when the circumstances are all in favour of the destroying element and against those who grapple with it. Messrs A.W. Redding and son, builders, Tennis Court Road, Cambridge, have been unfortunate victims of circumstance by which their workshops are practically gutted. Mr Redding was sitting quietly at dinner when a man rushed in with the news that the workshops had taken fire. He had once hastened to the building and seeing that there was some cause for alarm, communicated with the Volunteer Fire Brigade. Within a very few minutes the hose cart was on the scene. Under the command of Captain Greef no less than 20 fireman assembled. In the meantime two police constables had taken the police station reel to the premises and afforded material assistance in getting the fire under CDN 1898 10 05

1898 10 24

The normal quiet of Cambridge was interrupted by serious conflagration in Fitzroy Street which proved the most destructive to property that has occurred for many years. Cambridge is happily furnished with ample means of notifying outbreaks of fire, and it was through one of the electric alarms erected in various parts of the borough for immediate communication with the central fire

station that the resident night watchman received an intimidation that a fire was in progress. Telegraphic communications were without delay dispatched to the competent director of the Volunteer Fire Brigade and the majority of the corps. The wires running to those residing in and about Mill Road were unfortunately out of order, and seven of the willing firemen were therefore debarred from taking an early part in the work CDN 1898 10 24

1899 01 18

A fire which might have resulted in a very large amount of destruction broke out in Petty Cury, Cambridge. Mr Baynes, manager to Messrs Pollard and company, confectioners informed police constable Leonard Savidge at 1.15am that his wife could smell something burning. It was discovered there was a fire at the back of the adjoining shop occupied by Mr George Jackson, butter merchant. The constable ascended to the roof but was unable to get into the yard. Mr Baynes obtained some buckets of water from a tap on the premises and handed them up to him to pour on the flames. Acting sergeant Wright on going into Caxton Court from Sydney Street, found a ladder by which means he got over the wall and there found that a butter barrel, containing a quantity of paper was on fire. There was a considerable quantity of empty boxes and other inflammable goods about the yard and if they had become ignited there would have been disastrous results 1899 01 18

1899 09 25

Another of England's picturesque country residences has been destroyed. A prettier spot than the residence of Mr W. Hall at Six-Mile-Bottom, it would have been difficult to find. In every way typical of an English gentleman's home it was regarded by pride. The house was on Saturday the scene of one of those fires which turn a quiet rural retreat into a scene of utter desolation. The maid noticed smoke coming out of the thatch close to the kitchen chimney. From all directions came help but it was too late to be of any avail - 1899 09 25

1899 09 25

Fire Hawkins bakery, Gold Street, - 1899 09 25 p2

1899 10 09

On Saturday night the cooks left the kitchens at King's college, as they thought, safe, but P.C. Witham saw smoke coming through the roof. For fully two hours the fire brigade had their hands full. The staircase is quite burned down and access to the cook's room above is by means of ladders. On Sunday morning the cooks went to prepare the usual meals and members of the college were served as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred 1899 10 09

1900

1900 11 23

Fire broke out at the rear of the premises of Messrs Laurie & McConnal, Fitzroy Street, Cambridge. An employee noticed smoke coming from stacks of brooms, a bag of feathers, a stock of confetti and other material in the cellar. The staff of the firm set to work to extinguish the blaze and by dint of the application of water from a line of buckets and from a hose attached to the water tap, the fire was practically extinguished before the arrival of the fire brigade. It is surmised that a match was dropped down the lift hole by a passer-by, and so caused the outbreak 00 11 23

1900 12 22

A serious fire occurred on the premises of Messrs Coulson & Co., drapers at Peas Hill, Cambridge, and the flames were not extinguished until the entire stock of goods in the shop were completely destroyed. Captain Greef of the Fire Brigade arrived as did 14 firemen and nearly a dozen constables. The fronts of the shop were much damaged. The cause of the fire is attributed to the overturning of one of the incandescent burners in the shop window. CDN 1900 12 22

1901 02 01

Great excitement was occasioned in the neighbourhood of Burleigh Street, Cambridge, by an outbreak of fire on the premises of Messrs Prime & Sons, the well-known firm of builders. The alarm quickly spread and only a few minutes elapsed before a tremendous crowd of people had assembled to watch the progress of events. It was obvious that the efforts of the firemen and police were somewhat hampered by the increasing density of the large throng of onlookers. The conflagration soon illuminated the whole of the district, the flames hovering above the housetops in alarming brilliance
01 02 01 [2.11]

1901 02 18

An outbreak of fire occurred at the works of the Cambridge Brick Company, situated between Coldham's Lane and Newmarket Road on the outskirts of the densely populated district of Barnwell. The fire attracted large crowds and the flames, aided by a gentle breeze, spread rapidly, soon mounting in the air a distance of about a hundred feet. In just over two hours everything had yielded to the flames and all that remained was the damaged and broken parts of the valuable machinery. Fortunately the conflagration was confined to the corrugated iron roofed wooden building covering the machinery or the entire works could easily scarcely have escaped destruction CDN 1901 02 18

1901 02 21

The report of the Cambridge Volunteer Fire Brigade shows the number of calls received during the year was 20. Nine were received at the central station through the street fire alarms, two through the National Telephone Exchange system, eight by ordinary messengers and one by police constables. Senior fireman Fuller, having served upwards of 17 years has been made an honorary member, with permission to retrain his uniform 01 02 21

1901 05 16

Cambridge Fire Brigade Committee received a letter from the clerk to Trumpington Parish Council asking whether and on what terms the services of the brigade could be engaged in case of fire. Grantchester Parish Council accepted terms for the attendance of the brigade in that parish on condition that the charge for the number of men sent should be limited to the number required. CDN 1901 05 16

1901 07 22

A fire occurred at St John's College, Cambridge and considerable damage was done before the outbreak was extinguished. The scene was the third court, where a bedroom and a sitting room on the top floor of the wing overlooking the river were completely burnt out. St John's college fire brigade were soon combating the flames which had secured a considerable hold upon the dry and inflammable material of the building and it is undoubtedly due to their efforts that the fire was not much more disastrous. It originated in the bedroom where a lighted candle was left on the chest of drawers CDN 01 07 22

1901 09 16

Fitzroy Street fire, CDN 1901 09 16 p3 *

1901 10 07

Fire and police stations open, St Andrews Street [1.5]

1902 01 17

Cambridge Volunteer Fire Brigade's new fire station in St Andrew's Street is in telephonic communication with different parts of the town through the National telephone Co and by means of ten fire alarm posts. There are three permanent salaried firemen on duty, one during the day, and two during the night. They have a double call bell to the stables of the Lion Hotel where there were two horses in readiness to be called out for the fire tender. It was contemplated to have a steam fire engine but how soon it would come it was not possible to say. 02 01 17

1902 10 01

A fire broke out in the women's ward at the top of the left wing of Addenbrooke's Hospital. In a very short time the flames secured a firm hold and the unfortunate patients had to be removed. Flames burst through the roof and worked towards the centre of the building. Nurses and probationers heroically entered the wards and brought their patients to a place of safety. Many scenes, tragically distressing, were witnessed. To such proportions did the fire assume that it was deemed advisable to remove other patients and several afflicted old men were brought to the lawn. The news of the outbreak spread quickly throughout Cambridge and some thousands of people gathered in front of the Hospital. The scene on the open plot of greensward in front of Addenbrooke's Hospital presented a curiously medley of hastily-improvised arrangements for caring for patients evacuated from the blazing building. Bed after bed, each with its living freight, was carefully lifted with stalwart arms and borne steadily to the quarters assigned to it in neighbouring houses. In the meantime the dull clouds of smoke rolling skywards from the Hospital gradually grew less in volume. The ceaseless exertions of the firemen were telling their tale and soon water pouring in a cascade down the staircase adjoining the blazing wing made it clear that the building was flooded to the extent that rendered the further spread of the fire improbable. The police report on the Addenbrooke's Hospital fire says they found a man at the top of a ladder with his head through the trap door leading to the roof of Victoria Ward, using a small hosepipe. Shortly afterwards the firemen arrived and after much trouble, mainly through the low pressure of water, got to work, but could not extinguish the flames before the roof and contents of Victoria Ward were destroyed. Police assisted to maintain order, regulate the traffic in Trumpington Street where there was a large crowd, and remove and restore patients, many of whom were in a fainting condition. CDN 1902 10 01-04

1903 01 23

An exhaustive test of the capabilities of a steam fire engine took place on the lawn before Addenbrooke's Hospital. At first sight the 'steamer' produced an impression of admirable workmanship and construction. For an hour and a half the mayor, councillors and a large gathering of the general public were absorbed witnessing how quickly steam could be obtained of sufficiently high pressure to start the engine. Blank cards were distributed for the insertion of the time at which smoke issued from the chimney and with these in one hand and watches in the other they stood watching. When up to pressure a great volume of water was thrown above the roof of the Hospital c03 01 28

1903 02 14

Messrs Laurie and McConal are almost universal providers, for their extensive premises, nos.121-124 Fitzroy Street, contained many departments. Today they are no more. In their place is a great gap, a space which instead of containing the thousand and one articles wherewith to furnish the homes of Cambridge has nothing to show but heaps of charred timber, twisted iron girders and dismembered masses of masonry. The whole premises have been destroyed as completely as fire can destroy. In less than three hours they licked up goods and buildings valued at up to £100,000 03 02 14

1903 02 17

Many thousands of Cambridge people witnessed the spectacle of the fire at Laurie and McConal's in Fitzroy Street. The crowd increased to gigantic proportions and to keep them in check it was necessary to stretch ropes across on either side. The Mayor, Aldermen and members of the Fire Brigade Committee watched the progress of the fire and the unremitting efforts of the firemen. The interested crowd did not let the firemen work without encouragement and the fireman with the nozzle working in clouds of smoke was cheered heartily when he commenced his task. As soon as the hopelessness of saving Lauries was recognised special attention was turned to defending the adjoining premises of Messrs Sturton and Mumford. 03 02 17

1903 02 20

After the great fire in Fitzroy Street, Cambridge, public opinion was strongly expressed in favour of the Volunteer Fire Brigade being in possession of a steam fire engine. It would require, with driver and stoker, eight men to work the engine and, with reliefs of the same number, would necessitate 16 men being engaged. But with only one engine they would have been able to play four jets on either the front or back of the fire, and one side would be entirely unprovided for. The engines and paid

brigade would be so expensive that the town authorities would not be justified in incurring the outlay for protecting the few buildings at which they might be necessary. 03 02 20

1903 11 27

A fire broke out in a storehouse at Messrs Lincoln's premises in Sidney Street, Cambridge; a quantity of petroleum became ignited and the fire assumed dangerous proportions. Three hydrants were quickly at work with hoses taken through Trinity College and directed from college windows. But as the water streamed along the floor oil settled on the surface and becoming ignited created an effect of running streams of flame. At the time of going to press the fire was still burning but has been sufficiently subdued to enable some of the goods in the store-room to be removed. There were over 100 gallons of petroleum in store. 03 11 27

1904 01 21

Cambridge councillors considered the purchase of a steam fire engine. The two fires at Addenbrooke's Hospital and Fitzroy Street were bad, but took place under favourable conditions – in the first the wind took the flames away from the Hospital and in the other there was a brick wall, instead of lathe and plaster. Since then there had been two other fires, in Sidney Street and Rose Crescent which might have resulted disastrously. In the centre of town whole blocks of buildings might be burnt down. The only additional expenditure would be the cost of an engineer. But the Fire Brigade did not want one and they ought to know more than councillors. 04 01 21

1904 05 18

A fire destroyed Mrs Cornell's fishmonger's shop on Mill Road, Cambridge. It was caused through the ignition of some fat used for the purpose of frying fish. Although the shop was sparsely stocked there was sufficient inflammable material in it to make it impossible to arrest the fire in its early stages, and soon the interior was a mass of flames which rapidly penetrated through the ceiling and attacked the contents of the front room on the first floor. The alarm was given by means of the Thoday Street fire alarm and the firemen arrived within twelve minutes with the horsed fire escape and tender and prevented the flames attacking adjoining premises. 1904 05 18

1904 05 19

Cambridge Fire Brigade committee reported on the provision for extinguishing fires in large buildings and the cost of maintenance of a steam fire engine. They visited the University Library where regular fire brigade drills took place regularly, but there was no special provision for the escape of work people from business premises except in one instance where a canvas shoot had been obtained. A fire engine would cost less than £200 a year, which was less than that paid for the police imported on the occasion of the King's visit to keep order for a single night. But there was not space at the fire station to accommodate it and most of the large buildings were protected by means of private fire appliances. 1904 05 19

1904 06 03

Fire at Corporation property Peas Hill, used by Bell as corn merchants premises [2.4] - CDN
3.6.1904

1904 06 16

Cambridge Library committee referred to the recent fire on Peas Hill and the destruction of the premises adjacent to the library. But for the skill of the fire brigade the reading room must have been destroyed and the contents lost. The accumulation of books, pictures and scarce literature could never be replaced. Now the old dilapidated buildings should be cleared away and a more appropriate building erected. Next year they would celebrate the jubilee of the opening of the library and the appointment of Mr Pink as Librarian. The Library Association should be invited to hold their annual meeting at Cambridge, free of charge. 1904 06 16

1904 11 17

Up to last night there was a cluster of buildings, workshops, tool-sheds and fowl houses at the apex of a triangle formed by property facing Mill Road, Hemingford Road and Belgrave Road, Cambridge. Today nothing remains but a heap of charred timber and twisted iron. Fire has made a clean sweep of the evidences of industry of several inhabitants and caused damage of about £250. Mr G. Woolfenden, an electrician, has lost a workshop. Most people living in the three roads have a wooden erection of some kind at the end of their gardens and those burnt down stood side by side or back to back in an area covered by 20 square yards. CDN 17.11.1904

1905 05 02

An outbreak of fire occurred at the premises of Messrs Hallack and Bond, wholesale grocers, Petty Cury, Cambridge. About 11.18 pm smoke and flames were discovered issuing from a store room. The alarm was at once given and the horsed fire escape, tender and hose cart were soon on the scene. With the aid of one hydrant, the inmates of the building and the firemen succeeded in extinguishing the outbreak just in time to prevent a serious conflagration 05 05 02b

1905 07 08

Ely council debated whether to acquire a steam fire engine. Messrs Merryweather's estimate was £314 and they were willing to allow payment to be spread over three years. But they would have to build an engine house. Cambridge had many more valuable buildings and they did not think it worth having one. Many ratepayers felt it was not required; they had a system of hydrants and a very good pressure which would reach any ordinary building without an engine at all. But several shopkeepers said they should have one. 05 07 08a-cm

1905 07 15

Coe Fen was the scene of an interesting fire-extinguishing demonstration by the Valor Company. A light wooden erection had been constructed coated by three gallons of tar and a shavings and straw saturated with motor spirit was heaped around. It was ignited by a match and with such violence did the flames break out that the watching crowd was forced to fall back. The representative brought the appliance into operation and the fire was subdued in about 25 seconds. 05 07 15dd

1906 01 01

Fire gutted the Mill Road Boot Stores adjoining St Barnabas Church, Cambridge. The flames rose to a great height and melted some of the lead of the windows of the church. The building was a one-storeyed erection, largely composed of wood. A number of wooden packing cases at the rear formed a source of danger as they connected with a thatched cottage and a stonemason's yard adjoining was also seriously placed. 06 01 0

1906 01 06

A fire broke out in the roof of Addenbrooke's Hospital and extensive damage by fire and water has been wrought. A laundry maid saw wreaths of smoke above the roof of the operating theatre. The staff devoted themselves to the safety of the patients; those who could walk were hurriedly clad in warm wraps and led down the emergency staircase down which the more infirm, some on stretchers and some in their beds were carried. A similar fire broke out in October 1902. 06 01 06a-c

1906 02 02

Steam fire engine approved – 06 02 22a

1906 03 17

Steam fire engine acquired; also buy a smoke helmet linked by 95 feet of hose to bellows so firemen can stand in smoke to fight fire [2.5, 1.6]

1906 03 24

The smoke helmet purchased for the use of the Cambridge fire brigade is similar to a diving helmet. The upper part is made of still glazed leather fitted with square eyeglasses, the lower part is buckled

tightly round the neck. Two tubes are fixed to the mouthpiece attached to a bellows worked by a colleague, which supplies a continuous current of fresh air. There is also a speaking tube. It will be useful for entering rooms filled with smoke as well as sewers and wells where foul gases may be encountered. 06 03 24a

1906 05 17

Cambridge councillors compared costs for a motor propelled steam fire engine against one pulled by a horse. They had approached insurance companies for a contribution towards the capital expenditure but they replied that it should be paid from the rates. It was proposed that a horse-propelled fire engine should be obtained from Messrs Shand, Mason and Co, at a cost of £410 06 05 17a

1906 08 07

Cambridge fire brigade undoubtedly saved a portion of King's Parade, St Edward's Passage and Peas Hill from destruction by fire. There are numerous old houses, warehouses, sheds and outhouses of all descriptions, many constructed chiefly of wood. It broke out at Mons Buol's bakery, 17 Kings Parade; the bakehouse was gutted and hundreds of pounds of chocolate, almonds and sugar damaged. 06 08 07

1906 08 09

A demonstration of the capabilities of the new steam fire engine attracted hundreds of townspeople. It is a double cylinder variable expansion type made by Shand, Mason & Co., generating steam by oil fuel resulting in the complete absence of thick smoke and sparks. Water drawn from the stream in front of Addenbrooke's Hospital was thrown high above the roof of the building. It was then moved to King's Parade and threw water 20ft above the flagpole of Gt St Mary's church. 06 08 09a

1906 08 27

Balsham fire – why Cambridge brigade did not attend – 06 08 27

1906 08 28

Chesterton fire brigade gets horses from Castle Hotel for fires like Balsham – 06 08 28

1906 12 13

'The Sleepless Watchman' – the Leslie-Walker Fire Detector – was demonstrated at the Victoria Assembly Room. It ensures that no fire may occur without warning being speedily given both to the occupiers and the fire brigade. The detector is a sealed glass partially filled with mercury which is fixed to the ceiling. Should the temperature rise this expands and completes an electric circuit which causes a bell to ring. It resets itself automatically and is ready to report another outbreak. 06 12 13

1907 03

Fire destroys Pitt Club dining room, stewards room & offices & staircase; is new engine's first baptism of fire, pumped for 2hours once hydrant [4.5]

1907 10 12

Firemen fought a blaze in the roof of house in Rose Crescent. Underneath was the Modes and Ladies' Outfitting Establishment, carried on by Miss Hutchings and a large quantity of her stock was spoilt by the streams of water. After the fire was out the assistants were kept busy in removing hats and other goods from the shop. 07 10 12

1907 10 15

A fire occurred at the Fitzroy Street premises of Messrs Sturton. The possibilities of a similar conflagration to that which occurred at Laurie and McConnal's establishment a few years ago seemed probable for close by were a large number of paraffin barrels and tanks containing oil. Capt Greef and 20 firemen were soon on the scene with the horsed fire escape and the steam fire engine was got out in readiness. But their services were not required as P.C. Gee, assisted by several civilians, extinguished the flames. 07 10 15a

1907 12 07

When the Cambridge station Night Inspector heard of a fire at Bishops Stortford he despatched telegrams summoning workers from their homes. A truck specially designed for the conveyance of the fire engine is always kept ready but the engine itself is kept unmounted, ready for local fires. Within an hour a special train comprising a locomotive, the fire-emergency truck and a brake van was thundering down the line as, on board, a little band of half-a-dozen men busied themselves with preparations for the grim contest that lay before them. 07 12 07

1908 07 25

Fire engine arrives at Christ's College fire pushed & pulled by firemen, horses come later - "need motor engine or own horses, otherwise money spent is all wasted for sake of efficient motive power [2.12]

1908 01 10

Fire broke out at Bateman House, Bateman Street, the residence of Dr Rouse, Headmaster of the Perse School. A fire had been lighted in one of the bedrooms and mattresses placed round it for airing purposes. A maid informed PC Nelson who fetched the reel from the 'Globe'. The police force were enjoying their annual dinner, but a number were soon on the scene. A large crowd collected on the street and watched with interest the efforts of the firemen who used a hand-pump and buckets of water. 08 01 10g

1909 04 09

Fire broke out at the Ladies Training College in Wollaston Road. Very fortunately the vacation had denuded the college of students and only Miss Ellis, the Bursar, and six domestic servants were in residence. Hastily snatching up dressing gowns they scurried out of the burning building by the servants' staircase at the back. Firemen tied handkerchiefs over their mouths and nostrils and the smoke helmet was used for the first time. Considerable damage was done but the college may find consolation in having a building remaining at all 09 04 09

1910 10 21

A serious outbreak of fire took place on the premises of John Jarvis, horticultural builder of Hills Road, Cambridge and a large carpenter's workshop which backed on to the stables of the Warwick Hotel was burnt to the ground. It had been filled with wood and a fire was always kept burning to boil down glue. The brigade was soon on the steam but the engine had such a short run it did not have a chance to get up steam. When the water did come the flames had abated. A group of those ever-invaluable little mortals, the Boy Scouts, rendered valuable assistance in keeping back the crowd and helping with the hoses 10 10 21

1910 10 28

A Clare college undergraduate, Mr R. Chadwick Leach, had an exciting experience early on Saturday morning, his sitting room burning fiercely while he was fast asleep in the bedroom adjoining. The fire was discovered by a bedmaker who called some undergraduates and they at some risk to themselves roused Mr Leach from his sleep. The rooms on 'C' staircase comprise a bedroom and sitting room which are made secure by a door on the landing. He went to bed about midnight, leaving a small fire in the grate. The contents of the sitting room were completely destroyed and the damage must be considerable 10 10 28a

1910 10 28

The new motor fire tender is the very latest and embodies a number of new features. As well as a 45-foot fire escape it can carry seven firemen and a complement of life-saving equipment including smoke helmet, jumping sheets and 1,200 feet of hose. The acetylene headlights can be lit from the driver's seat while the vehicle is travelling by simply turning on the gas and moving an electric switch. Its extreme handiness, the rapidity with which it can be started and the speed at which it can travel – up to 30 mph - will render it of the utmost value. 10 10 28c

1911 03 24

Market Hill fire – 11 03 24a

1911 05 26

Great excitement was caused in Hooper Street by an outbreak of fire in the stable and warehouse behind Mr Wheeler's shop. The lean-to erection built against some cottage property contained goods of an extremely inflammable nature and there was quickly a blaze of alarming dimensions and intensity. Police sergeant Leonard Savidge ran for the Mill Road hose reel and firemen arrived with the motor tender. Happily there was no horse in the stable and the paraffin tank was not touched by the flames 11 05 26i

1912 01 19

A splendid test of the safety of the New Theatre in the event of an alarm of fire was carried out on Saturday night when it was found that 1,400 people passed from the Theatre in less than four minutes. The audience had no knowledge that a test was taking place and the staff had no orders except to throw open all auditorium doors and emergency exits. The house was crowded to its fullest extent and, as it was pantomime week, there was an exceptional number of children. The result is of particular interest as the New Theatre is to be used periodically as a cinematograph and variety theatre in which people are needlessly nervous of fire 12 01 19b

1912 02 16

The biggest fire seen in Cambridge for nine years broke out at Clement Johnson's rope, sack and tarpaulin factory facing the railway station. The building was completely gutted. The walls which must have been very strongly built when the factory was erected nearly 50 years ago, remained intact, but everything inside - sacks, ropes, twine, tarpaulins and marquees - was totally destroyed. Mr Johnson knew nothing about the catastrophe until he left a train and walked out of the station when he saw the whole factory ablaze 12 02 16f & 16a, biggest since Lauries [2.10]

1912 04 19

Sir – Cambridge Corporation have instructed all persons in the out-lying parts to telephone the Central Fire Station in case of fire. We in Chesterton are in a very awkward position. We have no telephones for public use. The nearest fire alarm post is at Quayside and one would have to walk, run or cycle there, and then fumble about in a very poor light trying to find out how to work the apparatus. We need a telephone call office instead. A doctor might be sent for, goods ordered from various tradesmen or one might even ring up his best girl – Philip Clare 12 04 19f

1912 09 27

Chesterton Road was the scene of a very remarkable fire. A motor lorry belonging to Messrs Sturton of Fitzroy Street, laden with cans of petrol was totally destroyed. The highly-inflammable spirit became ignited and a fire of extraordinary fierceness blocked the road with a sheet of flame. Can after can exploded flinging its contents in a blazing shower in all directions. The flames leapt to an astonishing height, reaching above the tops of houses and were accompanied by volumes of black, oily smoke. The paint on the door of a house on the river side began to blister and trees in the garden began to shrivel and smoke. It was impossible for the fire brigade to get near and it had to be left to burn itself out 12 09 27

1913 05 23

Two fires attributed to suffragettes occurred in the small hours of Saturday morning in the newly-completed houses in Storey's Way. One was almost completely destroyed but the other, being erected for the Balfour Professor of Genetics, was extinguished before much damage was done. In it were found clues which led to the arrest of a Norwich school teacher. One was a gold watch and the other blood stains on the broken glass of window. The suspect had a cut on her finger 13 05 23 p7 & 8 CIP [1.11]

1913 05 30

A blaze broke out at Messrs Macintosh's foundry in Thompson's Lane. After the days work is done the men draw the furnace to allow the fire to die out. When this is done huge sparks fly up, giving the impression that the place is on fire. But one of these sparks was blown on to the roof and set light to a beam. Had it been left the entire premises would have burnt down. But firemen, aided by undergraduates, put it out. 13 05 30 p11 CIP

1913 06 20

Peterhouse kitchen fire 13 06 20 p8 CIP

1913 10 17

At the Assizes the top gallery was filled with women when a suffragette was accused of setting fire to a house in Storey's Way. She denied having started the blaze but had been at the site and dropped her watch. It was identified by her uncle, a Norwich policeman. Pink flannelette smelling strongly of paraffin had been wound round a ladder and set alight. Her coat smelled of paraffin. She asked the jury: "Do I look like a person who would go about with flannelette and cans of petrol and set fire to houses". She was convicted. 13 10 17 p8

1913 11 21

The Fire escape and engine responded to the alarm of a blaze at St John's College where they found a bonfire burning in second court to celebrate the victory of a rower in the Colquhoun Sculls. Fireworks were discharged and a crowd gathered to watch the glare through the chapel windows. Later a fire broke out in a wicker chair in an undergraduate's room. It is thought a spark from the bonfire may have blown through the window, or a lighted cigarette dropped in the chair. 13 11 21 p11 CIP

1914 04 10

Under the proposed new regulation every cinematograph house should have a fireman in uniform to take precautions against fire and attend to the appliances. But when the Cambridge Picture Playhouse was built on Mill Road it met all the regulations and they had blankets and appliances with a fire drill each week. To have a fireman in uniform would be expensive and was apt to produce a panic in the event of a fire, magistrates were told 14 04 10f

1914 04 07

Fire broke out in the warehouse and yards of Robert Brown, 32 Gwydir Street. The stock which caught fire consisted of paraffin and other oils, matches and other general stores and five loaded vans and a pony trap were completely destroyed. The warehouses were built from tarred boarding and adjoined the house. Five horses were stabled at the back of the premises and helpers pulled down a fence to get them out, placing them in Mr Cock's stables. Stock which could be reached was thrown into the street and policemen controlled crowds of spectators numbering several thousand. 14 04 07b & c

1914 07 24

The whole of the Watts' Timber Yard on Newmarket Road., including sawmills, drying sheds and kilns were destroyed by fire. The blaze started in the stoke hole from which flames spread to the engine room and brick-making shed adjoining. The saw-mill nearby, containing a lot of wood, was soon alight and the wind blowing from Newmarket Road swept the blaze to the drying sheds and kilns where workmen removed the bricks. The tall chimney was expected to fall at any moment but the gable end of the saw-mill fell outwards, just missing firemen standing beneath it. However sheds holding valuable stock of flooring boards were put out. 14 07 24 14 07 31

1914 08 21

Thompson's Lane fire, St Clements Gardens 14 08 21 p3

1914 12 11

Fire at Trinity College on the third and top floors of L block in New Court. Prompt measure were taken to cope with the fire, college porters attaching a hosepipe to the hydrant and directing a steady stream of water on the flames. The Fire Brigade were called and 20 firemen were in attendance. The upstairs rooms became fiercely ablaze, and the flames attacked the landing of the staircase. The room was completely burnt out and a hole was made in the roof. The fire penetrated to other rooms in K block of buildings and two sets were destroyed and the roof was considerably damaged. Other rooms were damaged by heat, smoke and water. 14 12 11 CIPof

1915 03 05

An outbreak of fire occurred in the narrow three-storied block of buildings forming one end of St Tibb's Row and stretching from St Andrew's Hill for some 20 yards as far as the back entrance to the Lion Hotel. Several soldiers and the New Museums Fire Brigade helped fight the flames which had spread rapidly along the false roof and ceiling of the top storey from room to room. It originated in the brush factory occupied by Mr Barham where household brushes are manufactured after the contents of a tin of paint were spilt by a boy on a lighted gas ring. The factory was burnt out and part of the roof collapsed. Premises of Mr J. Biggs, robe maker also suffered severely 15 03 05

1915 04 20

Gwydir Street big fire premises Henry Ambrose builders paint shop 15 04 20 p7

1915 09 13

Fires at Cambridge. The Fire Brigade received three calls to borough fires during the past week. In the early hours of Wednesday morning they were called to a serious outbreak in Fitzroy Street, and on the following day they were called upon to pay two visits to the London and North-Western Railway, where an engine shed had caught fire. Only the alertness of a police constable prevented something in the nature of a catastrophe in Fitzroy Street. Three business premises were involved in the outbreak. The fire, it appears, originated in a shed, situated at the rear of Messrs Peak's stores and used as a warehouse for the storage of empty boxes. The large quantity of wood caused the flames to ascend to a great height, and set fire to the middle room of Messrs. Peaks' stores. The flames then appear to have travelled along a beam over Mr. E. Rouse's premises and joining the stores on the New Square side. Considerable damage was done to both shops, both by the fire and the water. Premises occupied by Mr. Waller were also damaged, the staircase being badly charred and the roof ruined in one place 15 09 03 CIPof

1915 09 17

Fire Kidman, builders, Abbey Walk; Fire Christ Church parish room 15 09 17 p5,7

1919 09 24

Cambridge fire fighters; Volunteer Brigade inspires confidence – detailed account – 19 09 24d

1920

1920 01 30

Fire back Peak's stores, Fitzroy Street - CDN 20 01 30, p3

1920 07 07

Volunteer Fire Brigade farewell dinner to Lieut Diver, Capt Greek makes presentation, memories of last 20 years - 20 07 07

1920 09 09

Mayor G.P. Hawkins drives new motor fire engine from Guildford factory - CDN 20 09 09 Ch 20 09 15, photo 15a

1920 10 19

Cambridge fire brigade should be under control of police and worked by permanent staff consisting of one sergeant and five constables, a reduction of one on the present permanent staff. Ten other police could act as auxiliary firemen, being paid for attending fires, ambulance calls etc. - CDN 20 10 19 to be handed over to the police - CDN 20 10 22

1921 01 12

Volunteer Firemen's last church parade – photo – 12 01 12b; police take control – 12 01 26a [1.19,2.8]

1921 08 17

Caius College fire in rafters – 21 08 17c

1925 02 27

Sidney Sussex fire, 25 02 27 p5

1925 11 06

Two fires caused damage to the extent of thousands of pounds in Cambridge and both are believed to have been caused by fireworks. It was particularly unfortunate that one occurred a few moments after the other, for the second was a much bigger conflagration than the first, and the fire engine was not then available. The first was to a corn stack in Natal Road but the other was at Messrs Kidman & Sons' wood factory yard and workshops in Abbey Walk. The outbreak occurred at the end of the building nearest the Coldham's Common allotments, but it quickly spread along the rafters and within ten minutes there was no earthly chance of saving the building. The roof of St Columba's Mission Hall was soon alight and the outskirts of Simper's rope works also began to blaze 25 11 06

1927 02 26

Compared to other towns Cambridge is badly off for fire equipment; we have only one motor fire engine whilst other places have two or three. The Chief Constable has recommended the purchase of a new "Dennis" 250-gallon Light Type Engine at a cost of £880. It will be more useful in the narrow streets than a larger type whilst the "First Aid" attachment can be got to work so expeditiously that small fires would be put out before the main hydrant could be coupled up. Will the council be convinced or will the question of pounds, shillings and pence be uppermost in their minds? 27 02 26

1928 10 30

Grantchester Mill destroyed by fire, hundreds flock to watch, blocking road [1.7,1.26]

1929 02 14

A serious fire broke out at Caius College, Cambridge. Two rooms in Tree Court were completely gutted and others badly damaged. Policemen attracted by the blowing of a whistle in Trinity Street got a hydrant in the courtyard to work and the Fire Brigade was quickly on the scene but the inside of the building was almost a furnace. The fire was quickly got under but not before considerable damage had been done, including the falling in of a large part of the ceiling. The firemen experienced bad conditions owing to the intense cold, the water froze on their clothing and icicles were left hanging from the ledges CDN c 20.2.1929

1929 06 11

Hawkins bakery fire, Parsonage Street, 29 06 11 p8

1929 08 17

Big Cambridge fire – sheds and railway trucks destroyed at Hills Road – 29 08 17

1929 08 28

Hills Road blaze – private residence – CDN 28.8.1929

1931 04 03

A fire was discovered in a gable of The Grove, Fordham; the damage was not great. The brigade cannot discover any cause of the outbreak. It is a part of old Cambridge folk lore that a fire always follows if a hare runs down the main street of a village. The week before a hare did run down the street at Fordham. It was perused by Mr Richard Nicholls, a septuagenarian, and was killed in a shed within three yards of the place where this fire broke out. 31 04 03m

1931 07 17

Fire completely destroyed the Rendezvous Cinema and Dance Hall at Magrath Avenue, Cambridge. The only part left standing is the fireproof operating box, which is really a separate structure. Staff removed 12,000 feet of film which, if reached by the flames, might have caused a serious explosion. The most spacious dance floor in the Eastern Counties was reduced to charred bits of wood. Renovations and improvements to the dance hall lounges were nearing completion and were to be opened as a special attraction. 31 07 17j & k

1931 09 18

A big fire destroyed four cottages beside the Chequers Inn off High Street, Cherry Hinton. They were of lath and plaster and thatch and blazed fiercely, though the fire brigade were summoned they were unable to do more than keep the fire from spreading. Only one of the cottages, which were owned by Mr Smith, a baker, and were the subject of closing orders, was occupied. The village turned out in large numbers and neighbours managed to get most of the furniture from the ground floor. 31 09 18c

1933 03 10

Two sets of new apparatus for the protection of firemen against fumes, smoke and all kinds of poisonous gases have been acquired by the Cambridge Brigade. It consists of a cylinder of pure oxygen inhaled through a mouthpiece connected with a bag which purifies the exhaled air by passage over caustic soda. The oxygen lasts for an hour. They will be kept on one of the fire engines for use in any emergency. 33 03 10

1933 05 11

Portugal Terrace fire – 33 05 11

1933 10 06

Near midnight one of the fiercest fires in Cambridge for years partially destroyed the Baron of Beef, a modernised public house in Bridge Street. The premises were rebuilt only last year at a cost of between £4,000 and £5,000. The scheme involved the demolition of four old cottages and three others were destroyed to make room for the new garages. [CIP 6th October 1933]

1934 08 16

Ye Olde Castle Hotel in St Andrew's Street was devastated by fire. Every fireman and policeman was called from other duties as smoke billowed from the gabled windows leaving people gasping at its pungency. Staff and volunteers busied themselves removing furniture. The Hotel ranked as one of the oldest inns in Cambridge, dating back to the 13th century. It was reconstructed about 1620 and the last extensive additions were in 1891. It is doubted whether it will be possible to restore the damaged parts of this historic building. 34 08 16 [1.2, 1.13]

1934 08 27

Cambridge's new fire engine, built by Messrs Merryweather, has a maximum speed of 48 mph. It carries an all-steel 85-ft ladder which can be extended in 30 seconds. At the top is a telephone to enable the fireman to communicate with the ground. Provision is made for four powerful fire-fighting jets of water 34 08 27

1934 09 28

Thousands packed the area around Mill Pool and gathered on Silver Street Bridge to watch a demonstration of the new fire engine. The most thrilling display was lifesaving by the Davey apparatus as 'victims' were lowered from the roof of the Mill Lane Examination Rooms. The only

flaw in the organisation was that the spectators were not warned when the water tower was set in use with the result that many, especially women and children, had a soaking. 34 09 28

1935 01 22

Fire destroyed the Evelyn White drapery shop in Fitzroy Street shop and the owner and his wife escaped in their nightclothes, with only a coat thrown over them. All that remains is a tangled mass of debris, blackened and ruin by the flames. Here and there the remnants of a dress could be recognised but everything was burnt beyond repair. Flames also threatened Norman Bradley's shop next door: the thin dividing wall was scorching and might have flared up at any moment. Firemen were kept fully occupied in keeping smouldering materials from catching again and were badly hampered through the insulation having been burnt off the electric light wires, several received electric shocks before it was decided to have the current cut off at the main. 35 01 22

1935 08 12

Houses were threatened when a line of flame swept three-quarters of a mile of land from Trumpington to Hills Road. In Long Road helpers beat desperately at the flames to prevent them spreading along the hedges to the gardens of near-by houses whose residents used garden hoses to dampen them down. Dozens of rabbits raced wildly over the charred ground and a leveret was turned into a living mass of flame. The verge caught alight, clouds of white smoke making it impossible for passing traffic to pass at more than a crawl. Vehicles were diverted via Cherry Hinton and all available police were mobilised to control the traffic and help fight the fire 35 08 12

1935 09 14

Peterhouse – the oldest Cambridge foundation – was threatened by a fire which broke out in a staircase in Gisbourne Court early in the morning. The Master, Sir William Birdwood (70) was one the scene from the start and did not leave until everything was safe, two hours later. Staircase H which contains six sets of rooms, was extensively damaged and several hundred books ruined. Its cause remains a mystery for the staircase, which is not far from the old Noah's Ark staircase, has been unoccupied since August 35 09 14b

1936 07 15

James Street was the scene of one of the most serious blazes Cambridge has experienced in years. It started when a Ford van caught fire at the premises of William Scott, house decorators, builders, motor and coach painters. It spread to their motor-body room where a number of cars were in for renovation. The place was soon a veritable inferno as drums of paint and oil exploded. Flames engulfed ladders and handcarts belonging to the Cambridge Window Cleaning Company then Messrs Pate's builders workshops which were reduced to ashes or scrap. The damage must run to many thousands of pounds 36 07 15 & a

1936 08 15

Old buildings at the back of shops opposite the 'Blue Boar' in Trinity Street caught fire. This is one of the densest areas with much valuable property including several college buildings. Trinity College fire-fighting appliance tackled the blaze from the back and the brigade's water tower fire engine was soon at work. Onlookers had a laugh when a frightened mouse was seen running along the pavement among the hoses. But the storehouse at the rear of Roper's shop was burnt out. 36 08 15

1937 01 18

Fire broke out at English Bros' timber yard in Newmarket Road; soon timber stacks, some of them 25 feet high were blazing with over half-an-acre of crackling 70-foot high flames. The Gasworks were far enough away but at Nightingale's garage a number of petrol lorries were in the danger zone and were moved. All three of the Brigade's engines were called into service but it was 13 hours before they were able to return to the station. A timber-drying shed was completely destroyed, a saw-mill damaged and a lorry completely burnt-out. 37 01 18

1937 04 30

Marshall's Aerodrome's special fire engine meets Air Ministry specifications for fire, first-aid and crash equipment. It is finished in fire engine red and black, the front seats are upholstered in best selected black hide and fitted with outsized fire and alarm bells. It is designed to meet any possible emergency with an impulse magneto which, together with the dash carburettor flooder and emergency gravity feed petrol tank ensures instant and easy starting in all weathers. 37 04 30

1937 10 20

An undergraduate of Peterhouse, Cambridge's oldest college, awoke coughing because of smoke and rushed through his burning sitting room to report the outbreak. Another occupant on the same floor attempted to put out the fire assisted by Mr S. Wilderspin, a porter. The Fire Brigade cut away floor boards to extinguish the blaze caused by a defective fire-place. The whole of the floor together with furniture and a wireless set was ruined. A club room beneath, situated in one of the oldest parts of the college dating back to the 15th century, was damaged by water. Another blaze of a much more serious nature occurred nearby about two years ago 37 10 20b photo 37 10 20

1937 12 10

An Emmanuel College undergraduate was trapped when fire broke out in his sitting room. He climbed out of the window holding the automatic life-line installed in the rooms, but as he was unacquainted with its working he was unable to use it. Porters fetched a ladder but by this time the lad, who had been standing on a three-inch ledge, had got on to a roof below his window. The fire brigade threw him a rope and, returning to his room he tied one end on to a bedpost and lowered himself on to their escape. A large hole was burnt in the floor and furniture damaged 37 12 10a

1937 12 13

A new police and fire station should be erected at Parkside, between Warkworth Terrace and East Road. The site is a very central one, had the great advantage of good access and egress from a fire-fighting point of view and the area is adequate for present and future requirements, councillors were told. Bearing in mind the possible future requirements for protection against air raids it was desirable that both police and fire stations should be in one unit on a new site 37 12 13

1938

Auxiliary Fire Service started, becomes National Fire Service 1941 [1.15, 3.7]

1938 05 30

Five people were burnt by blazing fat by an explosion at a fried fish shop in Cromwell Road. It occurred a moment or two after boiling oil in the fryer caught fire. The force was so great that it blew the window out of the shop and a woman customer standing inside the door was blown out into the street. Blazing fat dripped from the ceiling, it was like a firework display. A 15-year-old assistant and a five-year-old girl were detained in Addenbrooke's Hospital with severe burns 38 05 30c

1938 07 28

Plans for a new police and fire station on Parkside between Warkworth Terrace and East Road came before an Inspector. It was a central site with good access for engine and ambulances and suitable for future requirements. It comprised five houses with a pork pie factory behind. But owners, Peterhouse, did not want to sell. They were concerned about noise at night and some undesirable 'guests' at the police station reducing the value of adjacent property. 38 07 28

1939 02 07

The Auxiliary Fire Service wound up their training at Cherry Hinton Hall with a demonstration using specially made incendiary bombs. Two were used to set fire to a house of boxes kindly donated by local tradesmen which was tackled using an ordinary hand-pump with a spray jet. Many important lessons were learned. The bombs give off intense heat and coloured glasses must be worn by the fireman to protect his eyes. The application of water increases the ferocity of the flames. 39 02 07a

1939 03 16

Royston Council's old manual fire engine is a venerable relic but retains its 'Directions for Use'. "Put as many men at the handles as can stand both inside and out and move the handles quickly from top to bottom", it says. "Should an obstruction of the water appear ... it should be immediately stopped to allow the rubbish to be cleaned away ... On return from a fire it is advisable to pump clean water through the engine and remove mud ... that may have been drawn into the works", But in one of the pipes we discovered the mortal remains of a rat. The engine was given to the town by Henry Fordham and was only used for in-town fires. Now it may be sold. 39 03 16 & a

1939 04 14

Royston's ancient manual fire engine has been given to the Shepreth Museum Committee 39 04 14
CIPof

1939 04 25

The Central Cinema, Hobson Street, was burnt to a shell in the early hours of the morning. Only the fire-proof operating box, the foyer, crush hall and some of the back stalls remain intact. Firemen hauled hoses up to the roof of the Dorothy Café and from the high ladder of the Merryweather turntable in Hobson Street P.C. Kelly poured another stream of water on to the flames. But after an hour-and-a-half the roof fell in amid a shower of sparks. There was concern about Christ's College chapel where the roof had been removed because of damage done by the death watch beetle and only a tarpaulin covered the wooden ceiling. But a shower of rain helped to prevent it catching alight 39 04 25a, b

1939 04 29

Concern about number of fires in cinemas [1.16]

1939 11 08

The packing room of the Forum Cleaning Works, Hartington Grove was destroyed by fire that started in a machine in one of the cleaning rooms. This was put out with the aid of a fire extinguisher. The clothing was then put in one of the tanks and was run through a press room. When some of the staff reached the door, however, the handles of the tank burst, and the whole lot went up in flames; there was some danger of the fire spreading to a 500-gallon tank of white spirit. 39 05 26 CIPof

1939 11 08

Cambridge Fire Boat trial – photo – 39 11 08

1939 11 30

Over possessed an obsolete Merryweather manual fire engine of 1789 with three lengths of unserviceable hose and 11 buckets, it was valued at £7.10s. Willingham's had an 1827 fire engine, a trailer tank, six 60ft. lengths of 2-inch delivery hose, 20 galvanised buckets, two small ladders, two standpipes and turnkeys and two drags. Caxton equipment, valued by Messrs. Merryweather at £40 3s 3d was only worth £27, Cottenham's £37, Waterbeach's £29. Other parishes' equipment was valued as follows, Horningsea £3, Oakington £2 and Swavesey £6. 39 12 01 CIPof 39 11 30

1940

1940 03 12

Oakington & Waterbeach old fire engines to be broken up – 40 03 12

1941 03 22

College blaze. Extensive damage was done by a fire which broke out in the north wing of Pembroke College in the early hours of Saturday. The fire is believed to have started in one of the bedrooms of an upper storey, and the flames quickly spread along the whole length of the block under the roof. A fire-watcher raised the alarm, and regular and auxiliary firemen were soon on the scene with several trailer pumps, in addition to the three regular engines. Fire squads from the laboratories across the road and the college fire squad also assisted in fighting the flames. They had secured such a hold,

however, that it was two hours before they could be brought under control. Most of the damage due to the flames was in the roof and upper part of the block, but the thousands of gallons of water poured on the fire soaked through to the lower rooms. Many of the occupants of the block were roused from their beds when the seriousness of the outbreak was discovered, and some of them assisted in removing furniture to the court. The treasurer of the college (Mr. J. T. Spittle) said: "It is impossible yet to estimate the damage, as we cannot get into some of the rooms. The damage, however, is extensive." 41 03 22, 41 03 28 CIPof

1942 01 12

Cambridge fire guard organisation – duties of street parties – 42 01 12

1942 04 04

Gas Works tar storage tank catches fire, two men die – 42 04 04b

1943

fire station Coldham's Lane build c1943 to replace one Gwydir St, but during war part of National Fire Service when sub-stations all over Cambridge; not until under Local Authority control that Newmarket Rd & St Andrew's St became only two in city [446.15.3]

1943 07 24

Cosmopolitan cinema sustained considerable damage from fire, part of ground floor and seats destroyed and ceiling broken away in places – 43 07 24

1943 08 16

Fire guards – new plan, to work with N.F.S. to combat fires caused by hostile attack and summon assistance – 43 08 16a

1943 12 31

Magdalene College fire, started boiler room spread to upper part of the building which abuts the river; part of floor collapsed – 43 12 31

1944 01 01

Magdalene College fire in building now used as boiler room and store; the college pump brought into action, flames leapt through roof, extinguished by NFS – 44 01 01

1944 10 18

Fire in returned ammunition dump in East Anglia shortly before D-Day; firemen braved bursting 'ammo'; saved most of the heaviest ammunition and prevented widespread devastation. Fire started among some stacks of small arms ammunition and rockets; put out within eight hours but NFS kept watch for some weeks – 44 10 18

1944 12 28

Christ's College fire quickly extinguished; prevents major damage – 44 12 28

1945 01 05

Minister praised efficiency with which NFS tackled fire Christ's College – flames coming through one of the oldest roofs CDN 1945 01 05

1945 02 17

Fire in New Court, Trinity College damaged two rooms and destroyed valuable documents; occupied by Ministry of Agriculture and RCHM; smoke spread to offices of Ministry of Fuel & Power – CDN 1945 02 17

1945 02 23

Two rooms in a block at New Court, Trinity College, Cambridge, were severely damaged on Saturday by a fire which also destroyed valuable files and documents. One room, on the ground floor, was occupied by the Rural Land Utilisation Officer of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, and the other, on the first floor, by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England), and it was in this second room that records of work done during the last three years was destroyed. Very heavy smoke, which spread by communicating passages and staircases to the offices of the Ministry of Fuel and Power in an adjoining block, was encountered by the N.F.S., but they succeeded in keeping the flames from spreading. Six fire appliances were in action, and an oxygen breathing apparatus were also used in fighting the outbreak 45 02 23 CIPof

1945 03 06

Another fire Trinity in coal bunk, New Court, little damage – CDN 1945 03 06

1945 03 22

Disused brickworks in Coldham's Lane being used as Army motor cycle store damaged by fire but only nine of the several hundred machines inside were affected – CDN 1945 03 22c

1945 04 06

Fire damages several hundred 20s in tyre store behind Eastern Counties Omnibus Co garage, Hills Road – CDN 1945 04 06

1945 04 09

Fire Jarrold's shop, Market Street; hundreds of books destroyed – CDN 1945 04 09

1945 05 22

National Fire Service – 500 part-time men and women parade, Parker's Piece for stand-down; thanked for work – CDN 1945 05 22

1946 05 20

Fire in Old Court Corpus Christi College in building dating from 1352; NFS arrive quickly; if left longer the whole court might have been destroyed – 46 05 20

1946 06 25

Gasworks explosion and fire injures seven workers – 46 06 25

1946 09 16

Fire near engine sheds, railway station – 46 09 16

1946 12 14

Heffer's bookshop arson caused £25,000 damages – 46 12 14

1947 01 20

Trial Heffers bookshop arson & Lion Hotel, p6

1948 04 02

Yesterday saw the passing of the National Fire Service which had been administered from the Home Office since March 1941. Under the provision of the Fire Services Act of 1947 the Cambridgeshire County Council assumed the responsibility for the provision and maintenance of fire-fighting services for the county, and the occasion was marked by a transfer ceremony at No.1 Station, Newmarket Road, Cambridge 48 04 02

1948 09 21

In one of Cambridge's worst danger spots, the closely-packed buildings of Petty Cury, the most serious fire the town has seen for two years broke out, damaging half of the stock of Messrs Montagu

Burton, tailors. Firemen prevented the fire from spreading to adjoining shops but the whole of Burton's premises were gutted. Next door is Hutton's tailors where suits, coats and other clothing was covered by dust sheets to prevent damage from fumes. Burton's manager said "I went down in the cellar and saw the gas meter on fire and it was just like a giant blow lamp. We salvaged about half the stock". He added "I was flooded out at Jaywick a fortnight ago, and now ..." 48 08 21

1948 09 13

Blasting operations were carried out in Cambridge in an effort to locate an underground fire which is known to have been burning for a fortnight. It is at Messrs Duce's scrap dump in Newmarket Road. A squad of Royal Engineers from Bury S Edmunds fired three 10 lb charges of nitro-glycerine type of explosive, but the fire could not be traced. Traffic was stopped while the explosions took place and a certain amount of small debris fell onto the road. The fire is amongst scrap which has been tipped into a disused pit and covered with earth. Smoke has been seen issuing from widely-separated points in the ground and firemen have been digging in an effort to find the seat of the blaze 48 09 13

1949 06 13

Occupants of the caretaker's flat had to escape in their night attire when fire badly damaged the Friends Meeting House in Jesus Lane, Cambridge. The fire caused some anxiety since it occurred in one of Cambridge's three danger zones. It appears to have started in the main hall, where a charred piano and burnt-out settee were evidence of its intensity. The usefulness of the fire brigade's recently-introduced radio equipment was effectively demonstrated for calling reinforcements

1949 11 29

Damage believed approaching £900,000 was done when fire destroyed several thousand of finished wireless sets, 300-400 television sets and numerous components stored in a hangar rented by Pye Ltd at the former stereo works in Madingley Road. A director said: "Many of the sets were for export. Included in the stock destroyed were several thousand television cabinets. Some of our telecommunication equipment was also stored there, including a complete set of blind landing equipment due to be shipped today"

1950

1950 02 09

When fire broke out in A-block of Jesus College, Cambridge the occupant found his room and corridor full of smoke. He jumped out of a window on to the flat roof of the porter's lodge below. The undergraduate's sudden landing roused the night porter who gave the alarm. Tongues of flame were soon licking through the roof, part of which fell in before the brigade got the fire under control. A-block is one of the oldest parts of the college, which was founded in 1496 50 02 09

1951 06 13

New fire appliance, p10

1952 02 21

Sixteen patients were moved to safety when fire broke out in the nurses' quarters at the Evelyn Nursing Homes, Trumpington Road, Cambridge. One of them was 102 years old. The Fire Brigade tackled "the biggest job for a long time" and brought the fire under control. Chief Fire Officer, Mr Tom Knowles, paid a tribute to the conduct of the nurses: "They were cool, calm and collected and completely unflurried; they might just have been making a cup of tea", he said

1952 02 27

The "Homewash Laundry" in Abbey Street, Cambridge, was almost completely destroyed by a disastrous fire in the early hours of yesterday morning, but already plans are being prepared to rebuild the premises. Mrs Kathleen Morgan, proprietress, has received so many offers of help from other laundries that the normal run of business is being carried out. Salvage workers today reported that a

proportion of the laundry on the premises has been saved. This includes sheets, handkerchiefs, socks and all the stiff dress shirts and collars.

1952 03 07

Kinema fire, p6

1952 04 26

A new type of smoke detector, developed and perfected in Switzerland, is being installed in the Fitzwilliam Museum. It will be the first building in the country to be equipped with the alarm which utilises the principles of radioactive disintegration. Museum authorities carried out tests with a pilot system installed at selected points in the building. Independent tests were also carried out by the Cavendish Laboratory. The system is unobtrusive and will not interfere with the aesthetic atmosphere of the building. 52 04 26

1952 06 05

While 26 assistants searched for smoke they could smell in their living quarters above the premises of Messrs Robert Sayle in St Andrew's Street, Cambridge, a thick pall poured out of one of the windows on the top floor. When the alarm was raised a score of them dashed downstairs and through the shop carrying their belongings with them. One assistant, Miss Ann Todd, said: "I thought of all of my clothes and I struggled down from my room with masses of them. I wasn't going to leave them behind". As it was Thursday afternoon there were only about 30 people in the premises at the time. Staff organised a chain of buckets until the arrival of the Fire Brigade.

1953 01 17

A new type of draught excluder fitted to a Trinity College undergraduates' sitting room was so effective that nobody was aware it was on fire. The occupant was sleeping peacefully while in the adjoining room furniture and floorboards were ablaze. Smoke pouring from the fire was prevented from penetrating to the bedroom by the draught excluders recently fitted. The sound of crackling timbers woke a student on the floor below who gave the alarm. Undergraduates from other rooms on the staircase ran to safety but it was only after a ladder was raised to the first-storey 53 01 17

1954 04 30

A new tower being built at Christ's College, Hobson Street, Cambridge was slightly damaged by fire. It is believed to have been caused by heat from a small fire used for copper soldering which ignited the scaffolding and the base of the new tower. The builders working on the tower could not get down. It was well alight and the fire was beginning to spread into the college when the brigade arrived. A major pump, pump escape and turntable ladder were used to extinguish the blaze and they had it under control in eight minutes 54 04 30

1956 02 21

Fire seriously damaged Laurie and McConnal's warehouse in Willow Place, Fitzroy Street. Children and old folk were evacuated as over 50 firemen fought Cambridge's biggest fire for years in near-arctic conditions. They were taken to the Church Army Hall where, huddling round a blazing fire, they wondered what would happen to their homes. Volunteers from the Hopbine public house assisted firemen to save their furniture. 52 02 21c & d

1956 10 12

Men who never sleep – illustrated feature article – 56 10 12d e f

1957 07 29

Plans for a new fire station at Parkside met with criticism. £15,000 seemed an 'absolutely incredible' amount to spend. There seemed to be a lot of windows – did vehicles need to see out? But there would be a howl of protest if they put up a cheap industrial building. It would be the Fire headquarters for the whole of the county and everything would be under one roof. Earlier plans to include a police station had been turned down by the Home Office. 57 07 29

1958 05 02

Cambridgeshire Fire Brigade demonstrated its new extending ladder, which is designed in three parts and can be used to reach awkward places and corners. It can reach a maximum height of 45feet and is worked into position by means of tormentor poles. The firemen showed they had learned how to get it erected in the shortest possible time and in the most cramped of conditions. With further practice no doubt even swifter erection can be possible. 58 05 02

1958 06 19

Market Street fire – 58 06 19

1959 08 31

Research and experimental work in the University's Department of Metallurgy in Pembroke Street was brought to a standstill following a serious blaze. Flames came through the roof, two rooms were gutted and a laboratory severely affected. Water used to fight the fire seeped into the basement and caused a great deal of damage to expensive machinery. 59 08 31a & b [7.7]

1959 09 01

Fire at Caius college dining hall – 59 09 01a

1960s The Cambridgeshire Collection has detailed newspaper cuttings files from this date

1960 09 17

Fire swept through a dining hall at Newnham College causing thousands of pounds worth of damage. Firemen wearing oxygen breathing equipment struggled through thick back smoke to reach the heart of the blaze. A section of the flooring in the Sidgwick Hall was burned away and three hotplates damaged. Smoke has blackened the walls and panels have split outwards with the heat. It is not likely to be repaired before the undergraduates return and the girls will be split up in the other three dining rooms 60 09 17

1961 08 14

Fire swept through a warehouse and store room at the Radio and Television Service's factory in Gloucester Street. It was the second fire the firm has suffered at these premises this year, and the third to cause serious damage to the company's workshops in eight months. On New Years Day the factory was badly damaged and rebuilding work is not yet complete. Then three weeks ago their paint spraying shops at Sawston were gutted. Detectives spent the weekend probing the cause which was identified as an electrical failure 61 08 14

1961 11 21

The proposed new Cambridge fire station on the corner of Parkside and East Road is without doubt the best situation that could be found. It is on the immediate perimeter of the inner congested centre of Cambridge, has access to good routes and is well-placed to take advantage of the proposed new bridge over the Cam. It will replace the present fire station built in 1944 at the corner of Newmarket Road and Coldham's Lane which consists of war-time huts and brick structures on the site of a refuse pit. 61 11 21a

1962 02 23

Prompt action by firemen saved one of Cambridge's largest timber yards from being extensively damaged. The fire broke out in the dust extractor plant at Travis and Arnold's premises in Devonshire Road – on the night of the Fireman's Ball at the Dorothy Café. The Chief Fire Officer, R.J. Stepney, supervised the fire fighting in evening dress, before going on to the ball. There were fears that the strong wind would fan sparks on to timber near the railway rolling stock but after four hours the blaze was brought under control. 62 02 23c

1963 01 221

Firemen fought for six hours against a blizzard to answer an emergency call from an isolated farm house at Little Chishill where a chimney was alight. Engines from Whittlesford and Letchworth were unable to get through and firemen tried digging their way clear in deep snow. One tender was re-routed but that road was blocked too. A Cambridge engine also found roads impassable but with the aid of a bulldozer managed to get as far as Chishill Grange. Firemen then plodded over fields covered by thick snow and drifts. On arrival at Rectory Farm they took 30 minutes to extinguish the blaze, then began a 150-minute journey back to base. 63 01 21

1963 07 13

Cambridgeshire Fire Brigade's new Emergency Salvage Tender replaces one built on a converted 1939 pump chassis. It is specialised appliance carrying equipment for use in the rescue of persons and animals trapped in road and other accidents, together with waterproof sheets and salvage gear used to clean up after a fire. It also has electric generator and portable lighting and breathing apparatus. With four-wheel drive it can be driven over rough country when necessary 63 07 13

1964 05 16

Fire Brigade HQ, Parkside soon to open; 'temporary' buildings in Newmarket Road built during war have outlived usefulness – 64 06 16c

1964 08 21

As the fire brigade mobiliser tape-records the warning call, the operator retrieves a file on the area in question. There are cards for every village showing the quickest route and full information on individual building with instructions on the appliances needed and the position of hydrants. The system is vital to allow fire fighters to have information allowing a safer battle against the flames but with new buildings constantly sprouting the work of documentation is never complete 64 08 21a

1964 08 26

Spillers laboratory Station Road fire, explosion fear – 64 08 26b

1964 10 26

Parkside fire station built for the future with electronic devices, a 'fire house', recreation facilities and workshops to deal with 30 appliances; chief fire officer R.J. Stepney – 64 10 26b & c

1965 02 25

Parkside fire station operational, officially opened Feb 1965; site earmarked 1939 but delayed due to war, plans for fire station 1950 but delays; replaces hatted fire station on corner of Newmarket Road & Coldham's Lane built as war-time structure 1944 & also St Andrews St buildings [3.1,3.2,3.3]

1966 08 30

St Barnabas church arson – bibles and hymn books set alight – 66 08 30, 30a

1967 12 18

Turks Head fire, engines block street; third in 4 years, 1964 bar badly damaged – 67 12 18 [3.4]

1969 03 19

Milletts outfitters, St Andrew's Street damaged by fire which threatened a whole block of shops and offices; may have been raided – 69 03 19, 19f

1969 10 06

Fire engines have difficulty getting into Trinity Lane due parked cars [3.5]

1969 10 10

Royal Cambridge Hotel fire – 69 10 10

1969 10 15

Cambridge Scientific Instrument Company second fire in two weeks – 69 10 15

1970 05 28

Fire Serck Services radiator firm, East Road – 70 05 28

1970 12 08

Fire True Form shoe shop, Petty Cury was caused by candles used during electricity cuts – 70 12 08

1971 03 06

Fire at gas works when oil residue caught alight as workmen using acetylene torches cut metal plates from demolished gas storage tank – 71 03 06

1972 04 24

Two middle-aged women who jumped from a first-floor window into the Garden House hotel's back gardens to escape the fire were later found by a Cambridge milkman wandering along Fen Causeway in their nightclothes. A friend said "The women looked like refugees with smoke-blackened hands and faces. They had walked across Coe Fen. The milkman stopped his float and asked if he could help them". Miss Sarah Wilhelm from Ohio said she was woken by a burning smell. She saw the room starting to fill up with smoke and saw the paint on the inside of the door turning brown. She jumped from the window and the other lady followed 72 04 24 [1.17]

1974 06 01

Important research experiments were destroyed when fire badly damaged a wing of the University Department of Biochemistry on the Downing site. Four floors of the building, which was opened in 1963 and is the workplace of about 40 people, were damaged. Expensive equipment and research papers were badly affected on the second floor where research work into proteins is carried out. The top floor, home of the chemical microbiology research centre, was also affected c74 06 91

1976 01 12

Two students had a dramatic escape from death when they fought their way through dense smoke after a fire broke out at historic Magdalene college, Cambridge. An electrical fault triggered off the blaze which caused widespread damage to an isolated three-storey building and at one stage threatened to endanger the famous Pepys library. It was the worst fire disaster at a Cambridge college for many years. The last severe University fire was at the Department of Biochemistry when there was £100,000-worth of damage 76 01 12 [3.9]

1977 11 12

Firemen's strike for 9 weeks (till Jan 78); 'Green Goddess' engines used by military [3.10]

1978 12 04

Talk of the Town, Fitzroy St, gutted [3.11]

1980 09 22

Police are investigating a fire which badly damaged the former paper mill on Newmarket Road, Cambridge and spread into the roof of the adjoining Globe pub where customers were finishing their drinks. One who was using an outside lavatory spotted the blaze and alerted the landlord who evacuated the pub and called the fire brigade. The former mill, built in 1872, is owned by Norwich Brewers and has been empty for years. The roof has been badly burned and the walls damaged by smoke, heat and water. 80 09 22

1982 06 19

Cambridge was today stunned by a fire which gutted most of the Grove Infants' School, Arbury, and destroyed the staff block at the Manor School. Hundreds of people were woken in the early hours by the sound of the buildings being ripped apart by flames and small explosions. They went out on the streets and watched as firemen fought to control the blaze. Many wept openly. 82 06 19 & a

1984 09 22

An American Chevrolet rescue tender is the most recent addition to Cambridge Fire Brigade's fleet. It carries no water and is just used for getting rescue equipment to accident scenes. It is fitted with the latest cutting equipment, lights, generators and decontamination gear and has been specially chosen for its speed with its big 6.2 litre engine. 84 09 22 [4.2]

1984 12 24

Ridgeon's timber store in Cavendish Road went up in flames, in Cambridge's biggest blaze for years. Appliances from all over the county were rushed to the site and more than 100 men were involved in containing the fire which destroyed more than 800 tons of stacked timber. People in nearby Cromwell Road were evacuated from their homes because of the risk of gas canisters exploding. £750,000 damage 84 12 24

1986 05 07

Carioca Club & City Limits pub arsonist convicted – 86 05 07

1987 09 21

The scene of carnage on the railway line at Swavesey was too much for one fireman who came to help release the dying and injured from the mangled carriages. He was physically sick at the sight of bodies littered around the burned out shell of the passenger train, but like a true professional he recovered quickly and carried on. Fortunately it was not for real, but part of a major exercise involving all the emergency services. But no-one had told those involved until they actually arrived. They thought they were heading for a major disaster. 87 09 21

1988 11 28

Fire fighters battled for two hours to stop a blaze which seriously damaged Cambridge University's Union Society buildings. The famous debating chamber was saved but the main reception room was gutted and the bar and library badly smoke damaged. It is not believed to have been a malicious attack but probably caused by a smouldering cigarette. A major fire in 1975 damaged part of the debating chamber and two floors above 88 11 28

1989 11 15

Proposed redevelopment of Fire Brigade site with new station elsewhere cCEN 15.11.89

1989 03 04

Fire ripped through the University Zoology Department causing extensive damage and destroying important scientific work. Previous records in a laboratory used by Cancer Research Campaign workers were destroyed, wiping out years of research. The department had been on alert because of fears that it would be a target for animal rights protestors. Some experiments were saved because refrigerators continued to function, despite the intense heat 89 03 04

1989 07 28

Fifteen people were taken to hospital and a dozen evacuated from their homes after a major chemical alert in Cambridge. Forty firemen battled to prevent an explosion after highly toxic chemicals overheated at the Cleanaway plant. One was rushed to hospital when a safety wall collapsed crushing him against drums on the site in Cowley Road and three police officers were hurt as they helped families to escape the toxic fumes. Emergency services stopped all trains and the nearby Cambus depot was also affected. 89 07 28